

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-13 ACDA-07 OMB-01 TRSE-00  
CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00  
NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SIL-01  
LAB-04 /084 W  
-----181227Z 060590 /41

R 181156Z MAY 77  
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4005  
INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN  
AMCONSUL BELFAST

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 08179

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINT, PGOV  
SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRELAND: IMPLICATIONS OF FAILED  
STRIKE

REF: LONDON 7939

SUMMARY - THE END OF THE MILITANT LOYALIST GENERAL STRIKE, WHICH COLLAPSED MAY 13, INDICATES THAT ITS BACKERS MADE SEVERAL CRITICAL STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL ERRORS. AS A RESULT, THE NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE (NIO), THE ROYAL ULSTER CONSTABULARY (RUC) AND SECRETARY MASON EMERGED WITH THEIR REPUTATIONS MUCH ENHANCED, AND THE STRIKE LEADERS WITH THEIR STANDING DIMINISHED. WHILE IT HAS PROVEN DIFFICULT TO PREDICT EVENTS IN NI AND OPTIMISM IS RARELY IF EVER JUSTIFIED, THE CONCLUSION THAT THE STRIKE'S FAILURE HAS TILTED THE POLITICAL BALANCE TOWARD THE MORE MODERATE PROTESTANT LEADERSHIP APPEARS INESCAPABLE. THIS THEORY WILL BE TESTED IN THE MAY 18 LOCAL ELECTIONS. IF SUCH A SHIFT HAS OCCURRED, THE POSSIBILITY OF SOME LIMITED POLITICAL ACCOMMODATION BETWEEN THE PROTESTANT AND CATHOLIC COMMUNITIES WILL BE  
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GREATLY IMPROVED. WE ANTICIPATE THAT SECRETARY MASON WILL SEEK TO EXPLOIT ANY SUCH OPENING, AND THAT SOME KIND OF ARRANGEMENT FOR INCREASED ADMINISTRATIVE DEVOLUTION WILL FIGURE HIGH ON HIS AGENDA OF POSSIBILITIES.  
END SUMMARY.

1. FROM THE FIRST, THE LOYALIST GENERAL STRIKE LED BY

REV. IAN PAISLEY, ERNEST BAIRD AND PROTESTANT PARAMILITARY LEADERS HAD LITTLE CHANCE TO SUCCEED, BECAUSE THE STATED GOALS OF THE STRIKE -- A TOUGHER ANTI-IRA SECURITY POLICY AND THE RESTORATION OF THE STORMONT PARLIAMENT -- WERE EXCESSIVE AND UNOBTAINABLE, RESPECTIVELY. THIS WAS A CRITICAL STRATEGIC MISJUDGMENT IN THE STRIKE LEADERSHIP'S BASIC CONCEPTION, BUT THERE WERE OTHER ERRORS, STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL. AT THE STRATEGIC LEVEL, THE STRIKE ORGANIZERS OVERESTIMATED BOTH THE EXTENT OF THEIR SUPPORT AND THEIR ABILITY TO INTIMIDATE THE PROTESTANT COMMUNITY. THEY ALSO APPARENTLY UNDERESTIMATED HMG'S CAPACITY AND RESOLVE TO COUNTER THEIR EFFORTS, PRESUMABLY MISLED BY THE FALSE ANALOGY TO THE SUCCESSFUL 1974 GENERAL STRIKE WHICH BROUGHT DOWN THE POWER-SHARING EXECUTIVE. AT THE TACTICAL LEVEL, THEY OPTED FOR A SINGLE, CONTINUOUS STRIKE RATHER THAN, FOR EXAMPLE, A SERIES OF SHORT DURATION STOPPAGES THAT WOULD HAVE AVOIDED EROSION OF THEIR SUPPORT AND OF THE RESPONSE TO THEIR COERCIVE EFFORTS. ANOTHER TACTICAL FAILURE WAS THE LOSS OF THEIR SECRET PLANNING DOCUMENTS TO THE RUC -- THIS ENABLED SECURITY FORCES TO ANTICIPATE AND COUNTER THEIR CRUCIAL MOVES. AND FINALLY, PAISLEY MADE A SERIOUS GAFF WHEN HE ANNOUNCED HE WOULD LEAVE POLITICS IF THE STRIKE FAILED. HIS GRACELESS EFFORTS TO RATIONALIZE THE STRIKE'S COLLAPSE ONLY UNDERMINED FURTHER HIS POLITICAL POSITION AND PROVIDED AN OPENING FOR MODERATE UNIONISTS TO DEMAND HIS RESIGNATION FROM PARLIAMENT.

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2. WHILE WE WOULD NOT WISH TO TAKE ANYTHING AWAY FROM THE WAY SECRETARY MASON, THE NIO, THE RUC AND THE BRITISH ARMY HANDLED THE STRIKE -- INDEED, ALL PERFORMED SUPERLATIVELY, PARTICULARLY IN THE PUBLIC RELATIONS FIELD -- THEIR TASK WAS GREATLY FACILITATED BY THE ERRORS OF THE STRIKE LEADERS. THE UPSHOT, HOWEVER, WAS TO GREATLY ENHANCE THE STANDING OF HMG ON BOTH SIDES OF THE IRISH SEA. IT MAY ALSO HAVE HAD A DEPRESSING EFFECT ON THE PROVISIONAL IRA. MASON, WHOSE APPOINTMENT WAS NOT WELL RECEIVED BY EITHER THE UNIONISTS OR THE PREDOMINANTLY CATHOLIC SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOR PARTY (SDLP), DREW KUDOS FROM BOTH FOR HIS HANDLING OF THE STRIKE. THE NIO AND SECURITY FORCES DEMONSTRATED THAT THEY HAD LEARNED FROM THE 1974 STRIKE, AND APPLIED THEIR LESSONS WELL, ESPECIALLY IN THEIR SKILLFUL INFLUENCE OF THE MEDIA. THE RUC, AND TO LESSER EXTENT THE ULSTER DEFENSE REGIMENT (UDR), DEMONSTRATED THEIR WILLINGNESS TO FACE DOWN PROTESTANT PARAMILITARIES AND STRONG-ARM BOYS, IMPROVING THEIR STANDING WITH THE

CATHOLIC COMMUNITY. THE ARMY TOO OPERATED WITH GREAT

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 LONDON 08179

DISCRETION AND DISTINCTION, THOUGH REMAINING LARGELY  
IN THE BACKGROUND.

4. THE POPULAR -- AND WE BELIEVE CORRECT -- INTERPRE-  
TATION OF THE STRIKE OUTCOME IS THAT THE POLITICAL  
SITUATION IN NI HAS BEEN CHANGED; NOT RADICALLY, BUT  
SIGNIFICANTLY. ON THE ONE HAND, THE BALANCE BETWEEN  
THE MORE MODERATE UNIONISTS (E.G. THE OFFICIAL UNION-  
ISTS -- AND WE EMPHASIZE THAT DEGREES OF MODERATION ARE  
RELATIVE) AND THE HARDLINERS (I.E. PAISLEY, ET AL) HAS  
SWUNG SHARPLY IN FAVOR OF THE MODERATES. THIS SHOULD  
DIMINISH THE HARDLINERS' CAPACITY TO USE POLITICAL  
BLACKMAIL ON THE MODERATES WHENEVER THE LATTER SHOW ANY  
SIGNS OF MOVING TOWARD ACCOMMODATION WITH THE CATHOLIC  
COMMUNITY. WE WOULD STRESS THAT THE POLITICAL BALANCE  
IN NI IS AS DELICATE AS THE BALANCES FOUND IN  
LABORATORIES, AND SHIFTS IN POLITICAL SENTIMENT CAN OC-  
CUR UNEXPECTEDLY AND QUICKLY IN THE VOLATILE NI ENVIRON-  
MENT, SO THE SCALE COULD QUICKLY TIP BACK THE OTHER  
WAY. HENCE, WHILE THE CHANGE CAN BE PERCEIVED, OP-  
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TIMISM AS TO THE POSSIBILITY OF A MEANINGFUL BREAK-THROUGH WOULD BE FOOLHARDY. MOREOVER, THIS PERCEIVED SHIFT HAS YET TO BE TESTED.

5. THE MAY 18 LOCAL ELECTIONS IN NI WILL PROVIDE THE FIRST PROOF OF THE POLITICAL SHIFT THEORY, BUT IT IS LIKELY TO BE AMBIGUOUS. PAISLEY'S DEMOCRATIC UNIONIST PARTY (DUP) CURRENTLY HOLDS 21 LOCAL GOVERNMENT SEATS (BAIRD'S PARTY, A BREAK-AWAY FROM WILLIAM CRAIG'S VANGUARD PARTY, HAS NONE). THE DUP'S PRESENT TOTAL, HOWEVER, PROBABLY UNDERSTATES PAISLEY'S TRUE FOLLOWING, SINCE HE OFFICIALLY URGED ABSTENTION IN THE LAST LOCAL ELECTIONS. TOGETHER, ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, PAISLEY AND BAIRD HAVE FIELDDED 142 CANDIDATES FOR THIS ELECTION, AS COMPARED TO 284 FOR THE OFFICIAL UNIONISTS AND 155 FOR THE SDLP. UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, THE TOTAL VOTES BY LOCALITY MAY PROVE TO BE A BETTER INDEX THAN THE TOTAL NUMBER OF SEATS WON, THOUGH THE BOYCOTT FACTOR COULD DISTORT BOTH. IF, HOWEVER, THE THESIS HOLDS UP, PAISLEY AND BAIRD SHOULD DO APPRECIABLY WORSE THAN LAST TIME.

6. IF THE ELECTION RESULTS SUBSTANTIATE THIS THEORY, THE WAY WOULD APPEAR OPEN FOR A LIMITED -- AND WE EMPHASIZE LIMITED -- POLITICAL ACCOMMODATION BETWEEN THE POLITICAL LEADERS OF THE TWO COMMUNITIES. THE GOING WILL NOT BE EASY. PAISLEY AND BAIRD WILL NO DOUBT ATTEMPT THEIR TIME-TESTED POLITICAL BLACKMAIL TACTICS, BUT FROM A WEAKER POSITION, WHILE THE PIRA CAN BE EXPECTED TO DO ITS BEST TO FRUSTRATE THE CATHOLIC MODERATES OF THE SDLP BY STEPPING UP VIOLENCE BUT THE PIRA TOO MAY FIND THE STRIKE ERODED ITS BASE OF SUPPORT. SECRETARY MASON WILL TRY TO ENCOURAGE MOVES TOWARD ACCOMMODATION, BUT WILL BE CONTENT TO PLAY A LOW-KEY ROLE. HMG HAS BEEN BURNED TOO OFTEN TO TRY IMPOSING. OR EVEN DIRECTING THE CONTENDING PARTIES

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TOWARD A SPECIFIC SOLUTION. NEVERTHELESS, OUR CONVERSATIONS WITH NIO OFFICIALS SUGGEST THAT ADMINISTRATIVE DEVOLUTION -- THE PASSING OF ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROL AND RESPONSIBILITY TO ELECTED BODIES HAVING NO LEGISLATIVE RESPONSIBILITY -- WILL BE HIGH ON ITS LIST OF POSSIBILITIES. MASON WILL ALSO REMAIN RESOLUTE IN INSISTING THAT ANY ACCOMMODATION MUST BE ACCEPTABLE TO BOTH COMMUNITIES, EVEN THOUGH EXPERIENCE INDICATES

THIS CRITERION GREATLY NARROWS THE OPTIONS. WHILE THE  
ANTICIPATED OPENING WILL BE NARROW, ITS VERY APPEARANCE  
WILL BE A SIGNIFICANT ADVANCE.

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## Message Attributes

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